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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000594

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DANIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL PHUM KWBG IS JE GOI INTERNAL ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAELI PRESS REPORTS CLAIM ATTORNEY GENERAL

REVERSES ABSENTEE PROPERTY RULING

1. (SBU) Summary. Both Ha'aretz and radio station Kol Israel report Tuesday February 1 that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz has "instructed the government to immediately halt" applying the Absentee Property Law in East Jerusalem. Mazuz is reported to have done this through a letter to Finance Minister Netanyahu, who supervises the Custodian of Absentee Properties Office. Embassy was unable to obtain GOI comment on the press reports in spite of repeated attempts to speak with a range of Israeli officials in the Foreign, Justice, and Finance ministries. End Summary.

2. (U) According to the reports, the AG states in his letter that applying the law in East Jerusalem to the properties of Palestinians is not in accordance with the objective of the law. The reports also state that:

-- Mazuz wrote in the letter that applying the law to East Jerusalem properties "could also have grave diplomatic repercussions on the separation fence, which has drawn strong criticism from the International Court of Justice at The Hague. This is an issue where clearly Israel's interest would be to avoid opening new fronts in the world and in international law."

-- Mazuz claimed not to have been informed of the GOI decision to apply the law in East Jerusalem. According to Ha'aretz: "Embarrassed Justice Ministry officials could not explain how Mazuz wound up in the dark on such a sensitive matter, which clearly required a legal seal of approval. The issue constitutes a serious organizational failure that is now being investigated..."

Comment

3. (SBU) The Absentee Property Law issue has been front-page news since Ha'aretz first reported it Friday, January 28. It appears the AG has decided to take a clear decision not to apply the Law in East Jerusalem. Embassy expects to obtain a definitive GOI comment within 24 hours.

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